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AMENDMENT

Please amend the claims of the application as follows:

1.   [Currently Amended] A system for processing mail pieces into a pre-sorted batch for mailing, comprising:

~~a plurality of senders of said mail pieces, each of said senders to fill a container with said mail pieces;~~

one or more holding facilities to receive ~~said~~ a plurality of containers containing one or more mail pieces from ~~said~~ a plurality of senders, wherein a program rate of postage is applied to each of said one or more mail pieces, said program rate being less than a full rate set by a postal service for mailing an unsorted mail piece, and to gather said containers into one or more pools; and

a pre-sorting business to receive said pools from said holding facilities and sort said mail pieces into a pre-sorted batch.

2.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein a program rate of postage is applied to each of said mail pieces by each of said senders.

3.   [Canceled].

4.   [Currently Amended] The system of claim 1, wherein said pre-sorting business applies [[a]] said program postage rate to each of said mail pieces in each of said containers, for a total applied postage equal to said program rate times the number of said mail pieces therein, wherein said pre-sorting business is reimbursed by each of said senders of each said container in the amount of said total applied postage plus a fee for applying said postage.

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5.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein one or more of said holding facilities is part of a transport business.

6.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein a transport business provides said containers in an empty condition to said senders.

7.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein said containers are pre-addressed to one of said holding facilities.

8.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein a transport business transports said containers from said senders to said holding facility.

9.   [Original] The system of claim 8, wherein said pre-sorting business pays a transporter rebate to said transport business.

10.   [Original] The system of claim 8, wherein said senders pay a transport fee to said transport business.

11.   [Original] The system of claim 10, wherein said transport fee is paid in exchange for transporting one of said containers, independent of the number of said mail pieces therein.

12.   [Original] The system of claim 10, wherein said transport fee is paid in exchange for transporting one of said containers according to its weight.

13.   [Original] The system of claim 1, wherein said pre-sorting business transports said pools from one or more of said holding facilities to said pre-sorting business.

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14.   **[Canceled]**.

15.   **[Original]** The system of claim 1, wherein said pre-sorting business tenders said pre-sorted batch to a postal service for mailing.

16.   **[Original]** The system of claim 1, wherein said pre-sorting business prepares a document certifying to a postal service that said pre-sorted batch is qualified for mailing at an entry rate of postage.

17.   **[Original]** The system of claim 16, wherein said entry rate is less than said program rate.

18.   **[Original]** The system of claim 1, wherein said postal service pays a rebate to said pre-sorting business, said rebate representing the difference between an entry rate of postage and a program rate,

said program rate representing the amount of postage applied to each unsorted mail piece,

said entry rate representing the reduced amount of postage required for mail tendered in a pre-sorted batch to said postal service.

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19.   [Withdrawn] A method of supplying mail pieces to a mail pre-sorting business for sorting, comprising:

communicating a program rate of postage to a plurality of mail senders, said senders to apply said program rate to said mail pieces, said senders to fill one or more containers with said mail pieces;

receiving said containers from said senders; and

holding said containers in one or more pools at one or more holding facilities for distribution to said pre-sorting business.

20.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of transporting said containers from said senders to one or more of said holding facilities in exchange for a transport fee.

21.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of transporting one or more of said pools to said pre-sorting business.

22.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of receiving a transporter rebate from said pre-sorting business.

23.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of providing a plurality of containers in an empty condition to said senders.

24.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of pre-addressing said containers to one or more of said holding facilities.

25.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of receiving a request for pickup from one or more of said senders.

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26.   **[Withdrawn]** A method of collecting mail pieces from a plurality of senders of said mail pieces, comprising:

agreeing to pay a transporter rebate to a transport business in exchange for the collection of a plurality of containers by said transport business into one or more pools, each of said containers collected from said senders by said transport business, each of said containers filled with said mail pieces;

receiving said pools; and

paying said transporter rebate.

27.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 26, wherein a program rate of postage is applied to each of said mail pieces by said senders, said method further comprising:

opening said containers;

sorting said mail pieces into a pre-sorted batch;

preparing a document certifying to a postal service that said pre-sorted batch is qualified for mailing at an entry rate, said entry rate being less than said program rate;

tendering said batch to a postal service for mailing at said entry rate; and

receiving a rebate from said postal service, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and said program rate.

28.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of commingling said mail pieces.

29.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 27, wherein said rebate is greater than said transporter rebate.

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30.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 26, further comprising:

opening said containers;

applying a program postage rate to each of said mail pieces in each of said containers, for a total applied postage equal to said program rate times the number of said mail pieces therein;

receiving a fee from each of said senders of each said container in the amount of said total applied postage plus a fee for applying said postage;

sorting said mail pieces into a pre-sorted batch;

preparing a document certifying to a postal service that said pre-sorted batch is qualified for mailing at an entry rate, said entry rate being less than said program rate;

tendering said batch to a postal service for mailing at said entry rate; and

receiving a rebate from said postal service, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and said program rate.

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31.   [Withdrawn] A system for financing the processing of mail pieces into a pre-
sorted batch that qualifies for mailing at an entry rate of postage, said system comprising:

a program rate of postage to be applied to each of said mail pieces by each of a
plurality of participating senders of said mail pieces;

a transport fee to be paid by said senders to a transport business in exchange for
transporting a container filled with said mail pieces by said senders;

a transporter rebate to be paid by a mail pre-sorting business to said transport
business in exchange for receiving a plurality of containers and holding said containers in one or
more pools;

a rebate to be paid by said postal service to said pre-sorting business in exchange
for tendering said pre-sorted batch, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate
and said program rate; and

an agreement between and among said senders, said transport business, and said
mail pre-sorting business.

32.   [Withdrawn] The system of claim 31, wherein said transport fee is paid in
exchange for transporting one of said containers, independent of the number of said mail pieces
therein.

33.   [Withdrawn] The system of claim 31, wherein said transport fee is paid in
exchange for transporting one of said containers according to its weight.

34.   [Withdrawn] The system of claim 31, wherein said rebate is greater than said
transporter rebate.

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35.   [Withdrawn] The system of claim 31, wherein:

said entry rate is less than said program rate; and

said program rate is less than a full rate, said full rate set by said postal service for mailing an unsorted mail piece.

36.   [Withdrawn] The system of claim 31, wherein a program cost is less than a full cost,

said program cost equal to said transport fee plus a program fee, said program fee equal to said program rate times the number of said mail pieces,

said full cost equal to a full rate set by said postal service for mailing an unsorted mail piece times the number of said mail pieces.

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37.   [Currently Amended] A cooperative for pooling small batches of unsorted mail pieces for processing into a pre-sorted batch that qualifies for mailing at an entry rate of postage, said cooperative comprising:

~~a plurality of senders of said mail pieces, each of said senders to fill a container with said mail pieces;~~

a transport business to receive ~~said~~ **a plurality of** containers **containing one or more mail pieces** from ~~said~~ **a plurality of** senders and **to** gather said containers into one or more pools at one or more holding facilities; and

a pre-sorting business to receive said pools from said holding facilities, sort said mail pieces into said pre-sorted batch, and tender said batch to a postal service,

wherein said cooperative **is** bound by an agreement between and among said senders, said transport business, and said mail pre-sorting business.

38.   [Canceled].

39.   [Currently Amended] The cooperative of claim 37, wherein**, in accordance with** said agreement**, said plurality of** ~~further provides that each of said~~ senders ~~may~~:

apply a program rate of postage to each of said mail pieces; and

pay a transport fee to said transport business in exchange for collecting one of said containers.

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40.   [Currently Amended] The cooperative of claim 37, wherein, in accordance with said agreement, further provides that said transport business may:

receives receive requests from said other senders who desire entry into said cooperative;

provides provide a plurality of said containers in an empty condition, pre-addressed to one or more of said holding facilities, to each of said senders;

establishes establish a program rate of postage based upon operating conditions within said cooperative;

communicates communicate said program rate to each of said senders;

receives receive a transport fee for each of said containers collected from said senders; and

receives receive a transporter rebate from said pre-sorting business in exchange for the collection of a plurality of said containers into one or more of said pools.

41.   [Currently Amended] The cooperative of claim 37, wherein, in accordance with said agreement, further provides that said pre-sorting business may:

opens open said containers within said pool;

commingles commingle said mail pieces;

prepares prepare a document certifying to said postal service that said pre-sorted batch is qualified for mailing at said entry rate;

receives receive a rebate from said postal service, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and said program rate; and

pays pay a transporter rebate to said transport business in exchange for the collection by said transport business of a plurality of said containers into one or more of said pools.

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42.   **[Withdrawn]** In a postal service having a postal service facility and a plurality of mail senders, a method of processing medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces into a larger pre-sorted batch for mailing, said method characterized by the steps of:

> establishing one or more holding facilities;

> establishing a mail pre-sorting facility separate from said postal service facility;

> monitoring the size of batches of mail tendered by said senders;

> identifying said medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces, said batches having a quantity between a lower limit and an upper limit, said mail pieces within said batches bearing a program postage rate;

> diverting each of said medium-sized batches into one or more containers and transporting said containers to one of said holding facilities, where said containers are gathered into one or more pools;

> transporting said pools to said mail pre-sorting facility for sorting into a pre-sorted batch; and

> receiving said pre-sorted batch for mailing at an entry rate of postage at said postal service facility.

43.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 42, wherein said entry rate is less than said program rate.

44.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 42, wherein said lower limit depends in part upon the total sorting load at said postal service facility on a particular day.

45.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 42, wherein said upper limit depends in part upon the sorting capacity and the total sorting load at said mail pre-sorting facility on a particular day.

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    46.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 42, wherein said mail pre-sorting facility is owned and operated by a private mail pre-sorting business.

    47.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 46, wherein said postal service pays a rebate to said pre-sorting business, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and said program rate.

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48.   [Withdrawn] In a mail preparation system, a method of processing medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces into a larger pre-sorted batch for delivery to a postal service, said method characterized by the steps of:

establishing one or more holding facilities;

establishing a mail pre-sorting facility separate from a postal service facility;

monitoring the size of batches of mail tendered by a plurality of mail senders;

identifying said medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces, said batches having a quantity between a lower limit and an upper limit, said mail pieces within said batches bearing a program postage rate;

diverting each of said medium-sized batches into one or more containers and transporting said containers to one of said holding facilities, where said containers are gathered into one or more pools;

transporting said pools to said mail pre-sorting facility for sorting into a pre-sorted batch; and

delivering said pre-sorted batch for mailing at an entry rate of postage to said postal service facility.

49.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 48, wherein said entry rate is less than said program rate.

50.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 48, wherein said lower limit depends in part upon the needs of the sender and the costs of participating in the system.

51.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 48, wherein said upper limit depends in part upon the minimum number of mail pieces in a batch acceptable for processing at a mail pre-sorting facility by a mail pre-sorting business.

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52.   [Withdrawn] The method of claim 48, wherein said postal service pays a rebate to said pre-sorting business, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and said program rate.

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53.   **[Withdrawn]** In a mail preparation system having a postal service facility, a plurality of mail senders, and a mail pre-sorting facility, a method of supplying medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces to said mail pre-sorting facility, said method characterized by the steps of:

        receiving requests from said senders;

        distributing empty containers to said senders, said containers to be filled with said mail pieces;

        transporting said containers from said senders to one or more holding facilities; and

        gathering said containers into one or more pools for distribution to said pre-sorting facility.

54.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 53, further comprising the step of notifying said senders of a program postage rate to be applied to each of said mail pieces.

55.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 53, further comprising the step of receiving a transport fee from said senders for transporting said containers.

56.   **[Withdrawn]** The method of claim 53, further comprising the step of receiving a transporter rebate from said mail pre-sorting facility for collecting said pools.

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57.   [Original] In a mail preparation system having a postal service facility, a plurality of mail senders, and a mail pre-sorting facility, a method of collecting medium-sized batches of unsorted mail pieces for processing, said method characterized by the steps of:

receiving one or more pools of containers, each of said containers collected from said senders, each of said containers filled with said mail pieces;

opening said containers;

sorting said mail pieces into a pre-sorted batch; and

tendering said pre-sorted batch to said postal service facility for mailing at an entry rate of postage.

58.   [Original] The method of claim 57, further comprising the step of commingling said mail pieces.

59.   [Original] The method of claim 57, further comprising the step of preparing a document certifying to said postal service that said pre-sorted batch is qualified for mailing at an entry rate.

60.   [Original] The method of claim 57, wherein said postal service pays a rebate to said pre-sorting business, said rebate representing the difference between said entry rate and a program rate, said program rate representing the postage applied to each of said mail pieces by said sender.

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ELECTION OF CLAIMS

Claims 1-60 were originally filed and pending in the application. The Examiner has required a restriction for examination purposes between the following claim groups:

Group A.   Claims 1-18, 37-41, and 57-60.

Group B.   Claims 19-25.

Group C.   Claims 26-36.

Group D.   Claims 53-56.

Group E.   Claims 42-52.

The Applicants hereby affirm the provisional election without traverse to prosecute the claims of Group A (Claims 1-18, 37-41, and 57-60) for prosecution on the merits.

The Applicants expressly reserve the right to file divisional applications or take such other appropriate measures deemed necessary to protect the inventions recited in the remaining claims.